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ARTS

Kenneth Anger: A Strange, Free, Film-maker

by Carlon Tanner

Kenneth Anger has spent his life as a priest in the temple of cinema. Born in 1930 in Santa Monica, he made his first movie at age eleven (or so) and has been making curious, stylized, often outrageous short films ever since. The best-known, and probably the best, of these is *Scorpio Rising*(1963), a garish jumble of leather-jacketed motorcyclists polishing their glittering chrome machines, gay parties, Nazi symbols and old movies, with a great soundtrack of pop music by Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, and early Motown groups. It's a nasty, funny, fast-moving look at the fringes of American culture. Anger's earlier films, *Puce Moment*(1949), *Eaux d'Artifice*(1953), and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*(1954), look much like their titles sound. They primitively artful decadence and murky sexual imagery are more cloying than hypnotic.

Anger has always worked on his own, in 16mm., and with tiny budgets. His career has often been as bizarre as his films. Around 1960, he started to shoot a version of *Histoire d'O*. Pauline Reage's scandalous sado-masochistic novel, starring the daughter of a high French official (she told her father she was taking harpsichord lessons). The film had to be abandoned when her boyfriend, also in the cast, turned out to have been involved in the Peugeot kidnapping. The print, according to Anger (whose fund of strange tales is apparently inexhaustible), now lies buried in a milk tin on a farm in Normandy.

Lucifer Rising

He began his latest film, *Lucifer Rising*, in 1970, but its star, Bobby Beausoleil, stole all the footage and later joined the Manson family. Beausoleil is currently serving a life sentence in San Quentin, and the footage is thought to be buried somewhere in the Mohave Desert.

Undaunted, Anger began again, with financing from North German Radio, and has finished one-third (26 minutes) of a new version. Shot in Egypt, England, Iceland, Scotland, and Northern Germany, it stars Marianne Faithful as Lilith, Donald Cammell (who co-directed *Performance)* as Osiris, and Leslie Huggins, a young British steelworker, as Lucifer. Even after an introductory explanation, the elaborately costumed, stiffly gesturing deities and their ancient rituals (both drawn from Fraser's *The Golden Bough*) seemed distant and obscure. At times, Anger's strange images and Pink Floyd's music coalesce to create a vague, disturbing mood. His juxtapositions of pyramids and dung beetles, molten lava and magic, invocations and lightning, are often silly, occasionally exciting, sometimes both at once.

Most experimental filmmakers either abandon their difficult and thankless craft, or rise (if that's the word) into the industry, where the equipment works and the pay is good. Anger, to his credit, has done neither. He is still a free, uncompromising artist. He has collected most of his films, including *Scorpio Rising* and the first third of *Lucifer Rising*, into a "Magick Lantern Cycle," and is currently touring the country with them. He and his works will be presented by the Pacific Film Archive on Wednesday, April 10, at 8:00 p.m. in Wheeler Auditorium, and will appear at the S.F. Museum of Art on Friday, April 12, at 7:30 p.m. and on Saturday April 13 at 8:00 p.m.

From "Lucifer Rising," to be shown tonight at Wheeler at 8. Photo by Kate Kline May

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